

The Commercial Museum and Its Work

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to Promote International Trade Rela-
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Up in Connection
With Its Work

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[The upset condition of the commercial world today, the call for every bit of information available on the changing trade currents, has prompted this brief description of the work of the first institution organized in the world to promote international commercial relations.—EDITOR.]

FOR twenty-six years the Philadelphia Commercial Museum, created by act of Assembly of the State of Pennsylvania and ordinances of the Councils of the City of Philadelphia, has labored for the promotion and furtherance of international trade. From a nucleus of a small temporary office, several employes and a few exhibits of foreign products in 1894, the institution has grown to encompass a series of well-defined departments of work, each employing highly specialized authorities and the whole, including much valuable paraphernalia, being housed in an imposing group of buildings covering many acres of land in a convenient section of Philadelphia. To say that there is no other institution quite like the Philadelphia Commercial Museum anywhere is to call attention to the peculiarly comprehensive nature of its work and to its several divergent activities, all of which, however, have as the ultimate objective the linking together of the world's peoples in commerce and industry. To assist the stranger to understand and appreciate what the Commercial Museum is doing today and to refresh the memories of its friends, a few observations upon its quarter-century of development are here offered.

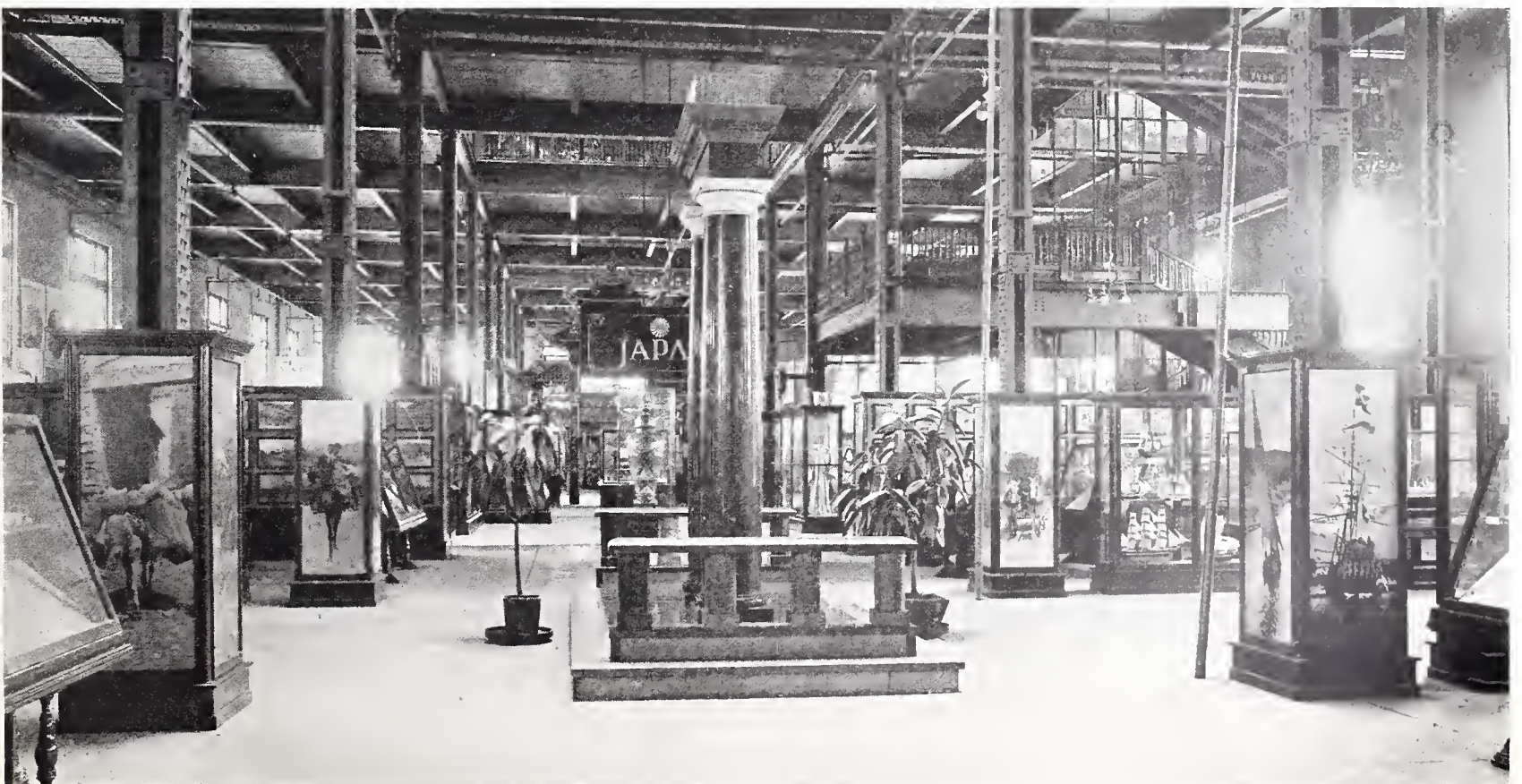
Born at a period when American interest in international commerce was at low ebb, the Commercial Museum had first to awaken a public appreciation of the value of international trade. Oddly enough, this work was not confined alone to arousing the interest and obtaining the support of the American citizen, but included the broader work of extending a hand across the seas. The initial step in this direction was an invitation to those foreign countries which



Office of the Director, Dr. W. P. Wilson

had commercial or industrial exhibits at the Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893 to donate them for the interest and enlightenment of the American manufacturer. These donations were later amplified, and others have since been added, until the Commercial Museum's present collection of the world's raw materials and examples of their use to mankind is without known duplication anywhere. Contact with foreign governments and business men was extended further by sending the Commercial Museum's own men to China, Japan, India, Australia, New Zealand, throughout Africa, and to all the countries of Latin America, not once, but to some of them many times. So effectively has this foreign propaganda been carried out that the Commercial Museum has the reputation of being more widely known abroad than it is at home.

To help the foreigner become familiar with the conditions



Looking Down the Main Exhibition Hall of the North Building, Where a Portion of the Museum's Extensive Collection of Exhibits Is on Display



A Detail of the Mexican Exhibit—Silver, Lead and Copper Ores and, in the Background, Sisal and Other Fibers

and requirements of the export and import trade of the United States and to build up sympathetic understanding among the world's business people, the Commercial Museum organized and held two foreign commercial congresses. The first of these congresses was opened in 1897 by President McKinley and was attended by delegates invited through the State Department from all the Latin American countries. The second of these congresses, held two years later, was attended by three hundred delegates from all quarters of the commercial world. These congresses proved so successful from every viewpoint that they stand as forerunners of later congresses such, for example, as the organization of the International High Commission whose periodical sessions and worth-while accomplishments testify to the value of international trade cooperation.

It may be observed that the early years of the Commercial Museum's existence were very largely devoted to awakening interest both at home and abroad in the possibilities of international trade development and cooperation, and making possible a medium of contact for peoples of every tongue and clime by which these principles could be practically applied. Believing as it did in the early realization of its ambitions, it is not surprising that the Commercial Museum largely anticipated the needs of those business men who expanded their interests to take in the broader sphere of foreign trade. Having, as it were, internationalized the business man the Commercial Museum now sought to serve him in the development of his broader commercial endeavors and activities. What the Commercial Museum is doing today is largely a story of this new work of service.

Educational Aspect of the Museum's Work

It is early discovered by those who sought to make the Commercial Museum of highest possible value to its

community, state and nation that the knowledge of the average individual upon such important subjects as the world's raw materials, where they are found and how they are utilized for the benefit of mankind, was decidedly incomplete—a condition not explained by any failure to cover the prescribed common school education. A similar lack of knowledge of the world's peoples, where and how they live, has been another handicap to those entering business life, whether or not foreign commerce in any of its many branches was the chosen vocation. In seeking to build men better fitted to undertake and carry on the work of the world, and especially that broader work involving international business and affairs, the Commercial Museum is now carrying on a vigorous and exceedingly comprehensive educational effort supplementary to, although entirely in cooperation with, the instituted schools.

Such educational activities include the study of the Commercial Museum's elaborate and extensive series of exhibits illustrating all the important products of the world and the present conditions of life and industry in the various countries. These exhibits cover three floors, each of which has 36,000 square feet of floor space. Some of them are arranged by countries to show the natural products and resources of the whole world. They display also the things which are characteristic of the habits, customs and tastes of people as far as these things have an influence on commerce and industry. Other exhibits are arranged to show the different commercial grades and qualities of one material as it is produced in different parts of the world. The cotton exhibit, for example, shows Upland, Sea Island, Egyptian, Peruvian and other kinds of cotton and illustrates also what is meant by "middling" and other grades. All these exhibits are made interesting to the visitor by the display of models and life-sized groups which show such things as the gathering and preparation of rubber, harvesting sugar cane, collecting turpentine and other important industries.

Lectures illustrated by lantern slides and moving pictures are given at the Commercial Museum daily by one or more of the institution's staff of lecturers who are



An Office of the Foreign Trade Bureau, Where Inquiries Pertaining to International Trade Are Received and Answered



The Reading and Reference Room of the Library of Commerce, Travel and Statistics

competent authorities on the subjects discussed. These lectures cover a broad range of subjects, many of which are chosen as a result of conferences with the teachers of the visiting classes. Special lectures are given to teachers and others according to their requirements. The lectures are adapted to scholars of from the lower grades through the high school and university.

These local educational activities appeal more properly to the Philadelphia schools or to those living within a short radius of the Commercial Museum. It is but a part, however, of the educational service rendered. For example, for other Pennsylvania schools where a trip of the scholars to Philadelphia is out of the question, so-called "loan lectures" are provided. These consist of lantern slides or moving-picture films and an appropriate printed lecture to be read as the slides or pictures are shown. Lanterns and screens are also included in the equipment sent out in the case where a school has no such apparatus. So-called "school collections" or miniature museums for classroom work are also supplied. These loan lectures and school collections in a large measure take the place of the exhibits in the museum proper and carry the Commercial Museum's message to out-of-the-way parts of the state.

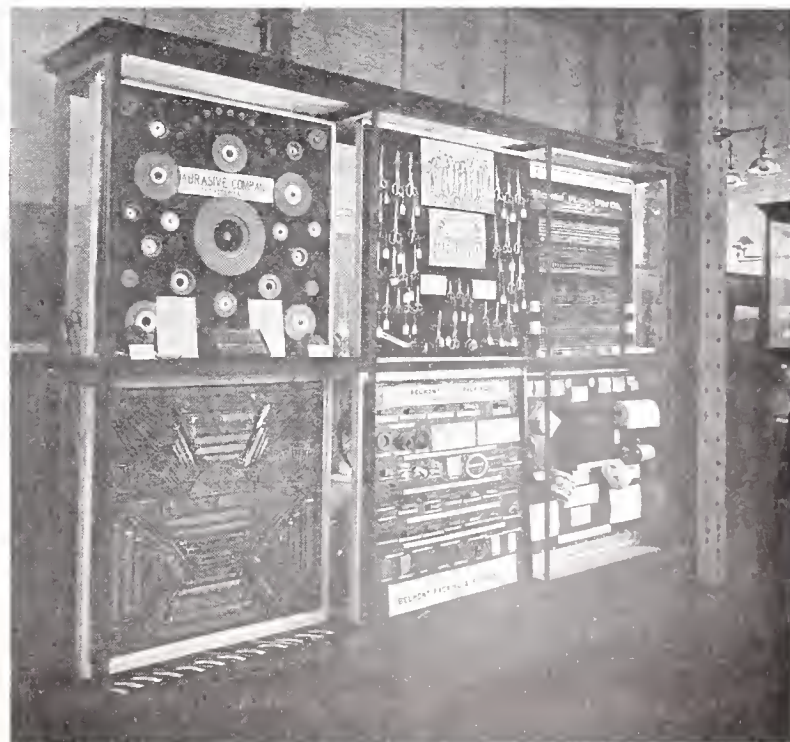
Serving the World's Business Men

Unlike that of the school or college, Commercial Museum service does not end with the passing of the student out of school and into business. Its service is the product of an institution which for twenty-six years has been in the vanguard of those actively engaged in serving the nation's business people and is doing this today in a way and of a character that only twenty-six years of international commercial activity and experience could make possible. Commercial Museum expansion has accompanied, or possibly even preceded, the expansion of the nation's interest and activity in foreign trade, by virtue of its policy of anticipating the needs of the business people engaged in foreign trade. The elaborate facilities which it offers make it possible for thousands of manufacturers and producers in all parts of the United States to carry on an export business intelligently and profitably. At the same time thousands of foreign importers who write to the Commercial Museum of

their desire to purchase American goods are put in touch with those American firms which are in a position to supply them.

It would not be possible in the space here allotted to detail all of the ways in which the Commercial Museum through its many departments serves those who are selling goods abroad or who desire to begin exporting. The foreign trade information and advice which is supplied daily to inquirers covers a very wide range and requires the constant supervision of a corps of experts and specialists. Advice upon the subjects of packing, shipping, the registration of trade marks, trade statistics, foreign corporation and tax laws, are but a few of the many suggested by inquiries picked at random from the large daily incoming mail.

Preceding anything else of its kind in the United States is the Commercial Museum's list of more than a half a million confidential reports on foreign business houses. The dollars and cents value of such a record, being



A Detail of the Exhibition of American-Made Products, Where Visiting Foreign Merchants May Inspect Samples Covering a Wide Range of Articles Manufactured in the United States

constantly revised and supplied with up-to-the-minute information by the Commercial Museum's foreign correspondents, is incalculable. It means that the Commercial Museum can supply to American exporters lists of foreign importers in the various lines of business all over the world and advise as to their moral and financial standing.

Not less valuable to those American firms who are interested in building up a foreign business is the Commercial Museum's large and efficient corps of translators, all of

a digest of the news of the week bearing in any way upon the business of exporting. This news comes to the Commercial Museum in such volume that it would be impossible to get it promptly into the hands of those desiring it in any other way than through the medium of a regularly issued publication of substantial size and scope. Valuable material comes to the museum daily from a score or more of sources, notably its foreign correspondents; the leading foreign newspapers and trade periodicals, and official notices of national and



A View of the Huge Convention Hall in Which Exhibitions and Meetings of Numerous Trade Associations Are Held Every Year

whom have had years of training and experience in translating commercial languages. It is difficult, if not impossible, for the layman to appreciate the difficulties of translating from one language to another of highly technical matter much of which is met with in catalogue work, and only those having had unfortunate experiences can realize the dangers involved in using carelessly or poorly translated matter. The years of experience and in addition the large accumulation of dictionaries, foreign technical journals and other publications make it possible for the translation staff of the Commercial Museum to succeed where other fail, and to furnish a translation service in many of the unusual dialects as well as in the modern languages commonly met with.

Among other features of Commercial Museum service is the impressive collection of tariff laws covering practically every country in the world. This collection includes not only the actual laws but the regulations made for enforcing the laws and the decisions of the appraisers in assessing duties under the law. The collection is the work of years and probably could not be duplicated. Its magnitude, possibilities and potential value in assisting exporters to build foreign business will be gathered from the fact that the information available on this one subject is equivalent to the United States tariff laws and decisions multiplied many times, in fact, about one hundred and seventy times. The constant attention of experts on tariff matters is required to file and classify the new laws and the revisions and changes to the old laws which are being made all the time. The tariff information in the Commercial Museum's possession not only makes it possible to advise manufacturers and exporters of the customs duty on particular products going into any part of the world, but also as to the methods in which they should be packed and invoiced to obtain the lowest rates.

The Weekly and Monthly Publications

Supplementing these services and to better keep exporters and manufacturers in constant touch with the current of commercial affairs in all parts of the world, the Commercial Museum publishes the *Weekly Export Bulletin*,

municipal governments all over the world. This news of foreign origin is entirely in addition to the domestic news bearing upon international commercial affairs, which is reviewed and published in appropriate length each week.

A most important feature of every issue of the *Weekly Export Bulletin* is the publication of bona fide letters received by the Commercial Museum from foreign importers desiring to buy American goods and asking to be put in touch with American manufacturers of such products. In addition to the publication of such letters and the news of the day, which includes such information as customs changes, mail regulations, orders and decrees of this and other governments affecting trade, statistics of trade, etc., there are especially prepared articles. These include descriptive stories of foreign countries, the principal ports of the world, illustrated descriptions of foreign business houses, and a monthly review of business conditions around the world which seeks to keep the exporter informed of the trend of international economic conditions and the business outlook in various countries. Another feature is the schedule of mail and freight sailings, published in the first issue of each month, which gives the exporter the names of the steamship lines, sailing dates and destinations of ships from the United States to all countries of the world.

Not only the Commercial Museum as an institution but the American producer and exporter has a message for the foreign buyer. In order that this message may be carried regularly and in attractive form, the export publications *Commercial America* and its Spanish edition *America Comercial* are published monthly and go over the seas to the world's principal importers and merchants. The object of these publications is to serve the interests both of the foreign buyer and the prospective buyer of American goods, and the interest of the American individual or firm who seeks to sell his wares in foreign fields. News and descriptive matter about American industries and their products is published side by side with the messages which the American producers desire to carry to foreign buyers through the

advertising pages of the publications. Descriptions of new products in various lines are also published and round out what is, in substance, a monthly reminder in magazine form of what the United States has to offer for the needs of mankind.

The Commercial Museum's Foreign Visitors

As the list of foreign friends of the Commercial Museum has grown to include representatives of nearly every race, language and country, the number of foreign visitors to the institution's Philadelphia home has greatly increased. These foreign visitors are welcomed to the Commercial Museum. Many take advantage of the facilities and conveniences which it so gladly offers. A desk can always be provided, for instance, for the convenience of these visitors from across the seas. Their mail, addressed or forwarded to the Commercial Museum, is either delivered or held to await the advices of the addressees. Most of these visitors are foreign business men and representatives of large importing houses, who are in the United States to contract for the purchase of American products of various kinds. When the entertaining and advising of such foreign visitors became more and more frequent in occurrence the need for an exhibition of samples of American-made products within the Commercial Museum's own buildings for the convenience of the visiting buyers became imperative. This exhibition has grown rapidly since its inauguration and its attendant success has made it an established feature of the institution.

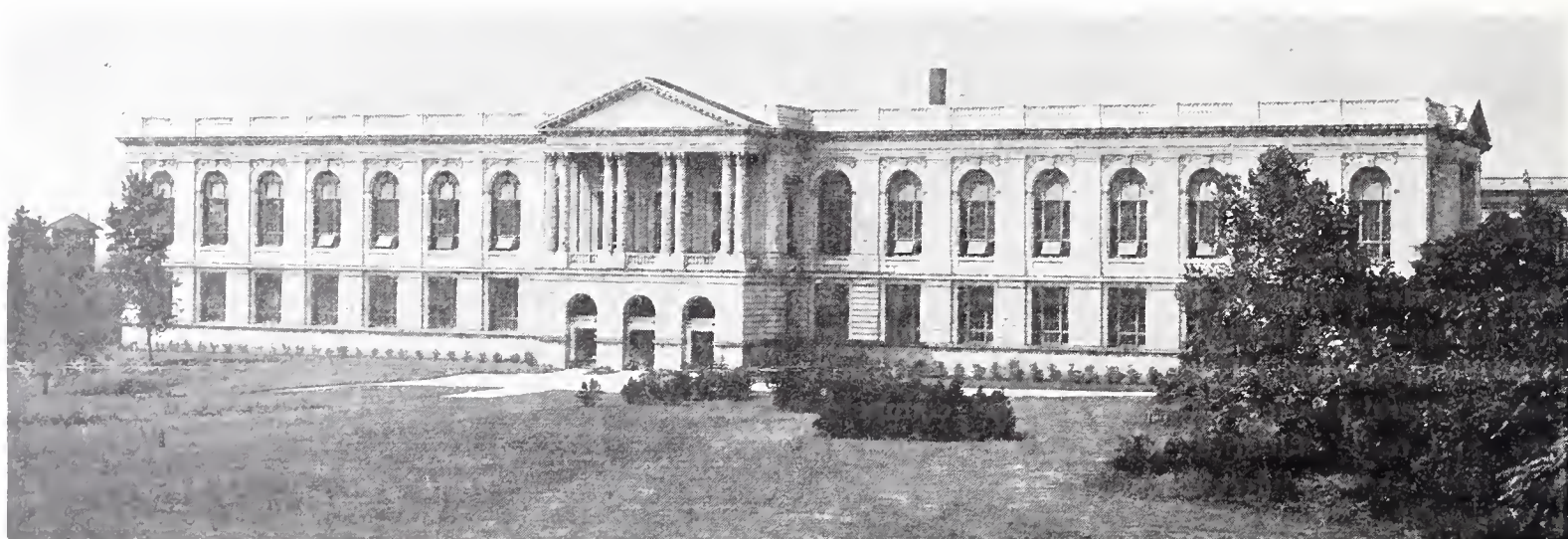
The Library and the Convention Hall

In its quarter-century of development the Commercial Museum has amassed a library of some 44,000 volumes and nearly 80,000 pamphlets. These may be grouped broadly under such general headings as books of travel, commerce, industry, and trade statistics. Official publications are received from eighty different countries and provinces, giving the details of their imports and exports. Unprejudiced authorities say that no library in the world contains a more complete or up-to-date collection of publications giving the trade and commercial statistics of the world's countries

Directories of foreign cities and countries are a feature of the Commercial Museum's library which has drawn visitors and inquiries from institutions all over the United States and even from foreign countries. In addition to these permanent reference works there are received thousands of trade journals, and newspapers, both foreign and domestic, each year. An idea of the scope of the current printed information available in the Commercial Museum's library may be obtained when it is stated that in 1920, as many as 14,373 trade journals were received, besides 4,615 economic, scientific and geographical magazines, and 2,372 foreign official gazettes.

Any discussion of the facilities which the Commercial Museum offers to the commercial interests of the country would be incomplete without some mention of the large convention hall with its 120,000 square feet of floor space and its adaptability for the use of every kind of large exhibition or gathering. In recent years many large conventions and exhibitions have been housed, including the large automobile shows and the exhibitions of hardware and kindred lines, hosiery and underwear, and foundry equipment and products.

By way of conclusion the thought should not be omitted that the Philadelphia Commercial Museum is more than a museum, it is more than an exhibition, a library, a school or an export trade promoting institution, it is a huge clearing house of international commercial information, and as such serves thousands and many varieties of business people in all parts of the world. Looking back over the years of work and accomplishment through which the Commercial Museum has passed, it is worth while to observe that its growth has been made in spite of the fact that the institution is conducted without possibility of private gain. A word of appreciation is also due to the public-spirited men who have labored in the interests of the Commercial Museum without reward of a material kind that the United States might lead the way as a builder of commercial reciprocity throughout the world.



The North or Administration Building of the Philadelphia Commercial Museum